

At War



Froyle's Volunteer Fire Service in August 1943 with the cup they won, competing against full time firemen. Not only were they the most recently formed team, but they were the only one to include a woman. The team are, from left to right, Mr Frank Laney, Mr S.Beckhurst, Mr Price, Mr Lawrence, Miss Banning, Mr Joe Lee, Mr E.R.Hill

The First World War

Looking at the records it would appear that life went on very much as usual during the First World War, although soldiers were billeted in the Park at Upper Froyle and also in a field between The Anchor Inn and Highway House in Lower Froyle, known as Anchor Plain.

Mr Summers of Froyle Place did his bit for the war effort, fitting out his car as an ambulance and travelling to Belgium and France with the Red Cross. Froyle Place itself was a military hospital for twenty men from November 1914 until November 1915 and, after that time, until the end of the War, was a Convalescent Home for overseas officers.

The homes of Froyle suffered heavily. Mr Summers' eldest son, Captain William Asheton Summers M.C., was killed at the Battle of the Somme on the 30th July, 1916, at the age of twenty, and his name appears, with those of twenty nine other Froyle men, on the War Memorial, which stands on a hillside between the two halves of the village.

Another of those young men who never returned was Tom Brownjohn, the eighteen year old son of Mr & Mrs Alfred Brownjohn, the proprietors of the grocers and bakers stores in Lower Froyle. The local newspaper of the time



The War Memorial, soon after it was dedicated by the Bishop of Guildford on 14th April 1921



Tom Brownjohn

reported his death thus,

“Private T. Brownjohn joined up in October last and was sent to the firing line after only five months training. Mr & Mrs Brownjohn received a letter from his platoon Commander; ‘In reply to your further letter of enquiry, I am sorry that I cannot give you better news. Your son was killed on top of a hill just above the Chambercy-Lary road, at 7pm on May 31st (1918). I can’t say exactly where he was buried, but it would be just in front of a line of fir trees, right at the top. Your son was very much liked by his comrades, who admired his clean healthy manner of life, and I am sure that his influence will still

remain, and work for good amongst the few men left, who knew him’.”

Tom Aitcheson was another Froyle lad who lost his life fighting for his country. The pain felt by everyone in this small community, not just the family, is quite evident in the entry William Downes makes in his school log book in November 1916,

“News has been received of the death of Lieut. Tom Aitcheson, killed in action. He was one of the best lads I ever had in any school. I had kept up a correspondence with him for years and when at home he always paid his old school a visit.”

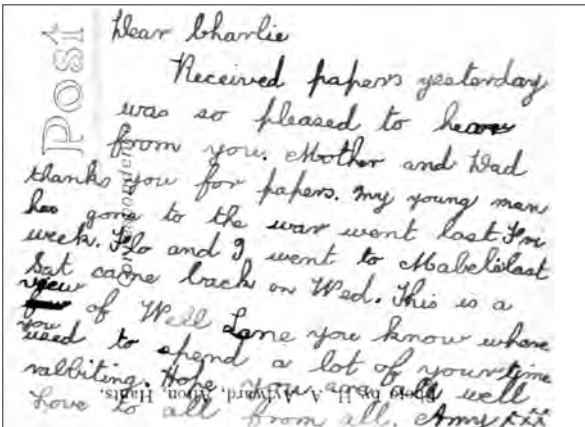
While the men of the village were away, the schoolchildren did their bit for the war effort. The Alton Herald of May 1917 has this report,

“In this village no less than 940 eggs have been sent up to the London distribution depot for the wounded and suffering sailors and soldiers. Each child, under the supervision of the staff, was allocated a district with a collecting card. Between them they collected 448 eggs and £4 2s 0d in money from those parishioners who do not keep fowls. This money was used to purchase fresh eggs at 2/- per dozen.

The eggs were carefully packed by the children in the boxes supplied - it is satisfactory to note that not one arrived broken at the central depot. The Parish is to be congratulated on such a happy effort to afford warmth and comfort to our brave fellows.”



So very often it is not the front of a postcard, but the back that can be of interest. This simple postcard, of Well Lane in Lower Froyle, has a story to tell us about the First World War. It was produced, as one of a set of at least 44 cards of Froyle, in 1912. How I wish I had all of them! This particular card was sent just 19 days after the start of World War One. The postmark is quite clear August 23rd, 1914. The recipient was a Mr Charles Taylor in Walthamstow, Essex, and it was sent by his sister, Amy. As you can hopefully read from the postcard, Amy



In those days postcards were often the quickest form of communication

has just said goodbye to her ‘young man’, who appears to have been called up almost on the day war was declared.

So, was this card from a Froyle girl? Let’s look at the Church Records! Yes, there is an Amy Louisa Taylor baptised on April 5th 1896 and she is the daughter of James & Agnes Jane Taylor - who also have a son, Charles Frederick, baptised three years earlier on January 15th 1893. This would mean that Amy is eighteen in 1914, providing, of course, that she was baptised soon after her birth. Additionally, she had a sister, two years older, called Florence May who must surely have been the ‘Flo’ mentioned in the postcard. The Taylors lived in Lower Froyle, in one of the cottages in the Rock House Farm area. Their ancestors are first mentioned in the church records of 1749.

As to who Amy’s ‘young man’ was, and whether he survived the ‘War to end all Wars’ we do not know, but the Church Records do show that on 24th April 1916, Amy Louisa Taylor married Thomas George Tindale at St Mary’s Church, Upper Froyle.

It would be nice to think that this story, at least, had a happy ending.

Troop Manoeuvres in Lower Froyle just before the Second World War. The photograph was taken from the lawn of Rock House Farm looking towards the five Westbrook Cottages



Bill Elstow remembers the coming of the Second World War to Froyle

“Before the war at the end of the summer the army would hold its manoeuvres in the country side around the village. The army was still not fully mechanised at that time and there was always plenty of cavalry around (see picture) with their wonderful cross lanced badges. And in those wonderfully balmy, phlox scented, long summer evenings after the days games were finished the grooms would walk the horses through the village to chat with the villagers and their daughters at the garden gates whilst we youngsters would run back and forth to feed the horses with windfall apples which they would eat in one devastating crunch and swallow.

The manoeuvres were always exciting for us, I am sure that there is very little difference in the noise of live ammunition and that of blank cartridges. There were certainly plenty of the latter for us to collect the empty cartridges for our own games. One must remember that blank cartridges still have a wad in the end which can be very painful if it hits you from short range. On one occasion some Infantry were laying prone hidden behind a hedge about three foot above the road when some very important looking map reading officers on horseback turned into the lane. As they reached the middle of the ambush someone started

Troop Manoeuvres in the field opposite Sylvesters Farm, Lower Froyle



to open fire. There is no need to describe the resulting mayhem of bucking horses and unseated riders to contemplate what punishment was meted out to impress on the hoi-poloi one of the things that one does not do to Officers and Gentlemen but, more importantly, certainly not to their horses. But all this was to disappear very quickly with the arrival of the Bren gun carrier.

It so happened that I was in Froyle on the first day of the war. It was a Sunday and I was waiting for my parents to arrive to take me back home to start at my new grammar school.

In Froyle at about quarter past eleven a monoplane flew low over the village and it is remarkable how many people had clearly seen the black and white crosses on its wings. But it is such things that pub conversations are made of, all enjoy listening to it even if they don't believe a word of it and in any case they were there too and can't quite remember whether it was six or seven that they saw. By turning out time the lone Hurricane had probably become a squadron of German heavy bombers. Little did we know that soon this was to be, for some, the stark reality, but not in Froyle.

By the outbreak of war the Army was already a permanent resident of the village in the form of a searchlight battery up Well Lane. They cleared an old gravel working for their generator and provided another topic of conversation in claiming that they had killed over two hundred adders in so doing. The searchlight was further down the lane nearer the village and some of us were playing there on the Friday before the Sunday when a lorry arrived to issue some rifles with the news that the Germans had entered Poland that morning. I am now ashamed to admit that for us youngsters it was all very exciting and something to look forward to. I can only plead an ignorance that would be rectified in the following years.

It was difficult to understand why a searchlight was situated at Froyle, there were no AA guns nearby, unless it was to serve as a beacon for our own aircraft going into RAF Odiham. It must have been one of the cushiest postings of the war. That is not to say that Froyle saw no action. A German bomber did drop some bombs up in the woods by the common and a bomb disposal squad had to come and dig them up and let them off. The operation took several days and we used to delight in joining the soldiers at lunch time pulled up in their lorry outside the Prince of Wales, trying to cadge a badge from them.

We had double summertime which gave us long summer evenings and we used to collect at Hadwick's corner on a collection of old hay wagons which had been drawn up onto the cleared bank so that they could be used by the Home Guard to block the road in the case of an invasion."

The Second World War, as seen through the eyes of Mr E.R.Hill, writing in the Froyle W.I.Scrapbook in 1952

“During this War the loss of husbands and sons from the homes of Froyle was much less than in the previous one. The names of Hubert Brownjohn, C.Goodyear, R.S.Morgan, W.A.Morris, and W.Stevens, appear on the War Memorial together with those of Mr Chubb’s son, Richard, who was killed in an air raid while on civilian war service in London, and of Phyllis Savage, whose death was due to an accident at her WAAF Camp.

The village was too near points of danger such as Lasham and Bordon to be considered safe for official evacuees, though there were a number of voluntary evacuees. Because of this danger, the Home Defence was highly organised. Mr E.R.Hill was Head of a capable band of Wardens. Mrs Sangster organised a large company of First Aiders, which was able to carry on after she and Father Sangster left the village. At the Vicarage, and later at Park Edge, Mrs Sumner’s house, there was a First Aid Station, with sub-stations at Mrs Shell’s, Husseys Lane, Sylvesters, and Oak Cottage.

In May 1940, Mr Hill formed a volunteer Fire Brigade. Beginning with a length of hose and a group of men looking at it, by July the Brigade was able to give a demonstration at Marelands, Bentley. Major Wade, lately retired from his command of the Farnham Fire Brigade, was loud in his praise. Meanwhile, better equipment was acquired and in September 1940 the Brigade was recognised as a branch of the Alton Rural Fire Service. In July 1943 Froyle was officially enrolled in the National Fire Service.

Its greatest triumph was on August 6th of that year. Here follows the account given by the Hampshire Herald:

‘A Fire Brigade competition was held, in which teams from Froyle and Binsted took part, in addition to the regular and part-time members of the

N.F.S. at Alton, and a surprising feature was that the full-time members of the service were beaten by the part-timers, while the Cup, which was presented to the successful contestants by Mrs Busby, was awarded to Froyle, the most recently formed team and, incidentally, the only one which included a woman.’

In spite of its position, Froyle was fortunate in having no bombs on the village. One heavy bomb fell in High Woods making a crater large enough to contain a cottage, and another large one fell nearby. Neither of these had exploded, so they had to be dealt with by the Aldershot authorities. Three bombs and a fire bomb fell in the fields about a hundred yards from the main road. These did no harm whatever, but traffic had to be diverted through Froyle village. The nights were most alarming when great fleets of German planes passed over the village, going to Coventry and Birmingham.



Oak Cottage, Lower Froyle, in the summer of 1915

There was a Searchlight Camp of about ten men, later becoming a Radar Station, in a field near the chalkpit in Well Lane. The work done there was of a highly technical nature, but the ladies of Oak Cottage, who had given the men leave to use their bathroom, were not a little amused at the inability of some of them to manage a common gas geysers.

At the close of the War, a Welcome Home Fund was organised by Mrs Emery and Mrs William Rhodes, who raised about seven hundred pounds, which was divided among some eighty Froyle men who returned to the village.”

Mr Hill mentions ‘the ladies of Oak Cottage’ - these were a Miss May Ollis Pelton and Miss Vera Walker. Not only did the ladies share their bathroom with ten men, but they were amongst a number of W.I.ladies who did their bit for the war effort by making jam. Up until 1941 this posed no problems as the ladies obviously made the jam in their own homes but, in that year, the Ministry of Food issued instructions that jam making would now have to be carried out in public buildings. Miss Pelton wrote to the Parish Council on behalf of the W.I., asking that the hut on the Recreation Ground be fitted with a sink and cupboard. After much discussion the Council agreed providing the cost did not exceed thirteen pounds. It obviously did not, as we read in the Farnham Herald of 4th October 1941:

“Between 800 and 900 pounds of jam were made during the season by members of the Froyle Fruit Preservation Centre at The Hut.”

Air Raid Precautions

Mr E. Hill was Head Warden for Froyle and his daughter, Ann, has provided us with a superb insight into just how the village pulled together in those dark days of the war. She has details from Alton Rural District Council's Air Raid Precautions, listing the people in Froyle who could be called on in an emergency and I make no excuse for reproducing it in full!

FROYLE'S TEAM

Head Warden

Name	Address	Notes	Task
Hill, Ernest Rivers	Elm Croft	Builder, Undertaker. Available any time. Has car.	
Savage, Albert	Millcourt Cottage	Available at night	First Aid
White, Harriet	Lower Froyle	Can't drive, no car	First Aid
Savage, Herbert	Millcourt Cottages	Farm Worker	First Aid
Cousins	Coldrey	Has motor cycle	First Aid
Savage, Doreen	Millcourt Cottages	Works Crosby & Co	First Aid
Cox, Hilda	West End	Will go out day or night	First Aid
Rix, Gordon	Homestead Cottage	Plumber	Fire Guard
Savage, William	Brewery Cottages	Works at F.Stevens	Rescue Party
Pinnells, Alfred	Lower Froyle	Was in Army. Pedal cycle	Rescue Party
Vickery, Charles	Lower Froyle	Available at night	Rescue Party
Shell, Andrew	Husseys Farm	Has car. Day or Night	Rescue Party
Rhodes, Frederick	1 Brewery Cottage	Can do day or night	Rescue Party
Dedman, Albert	Husseys Lane	Worked Husseys Farm	Rescue Party
Brownjohn, William	Rock House Farm	Farmer. Has motor cycle	Rescue Party
Pinnells, Frank	Lower Froyle	Ex-Service. Farm worker	Warden
Harvey, Theodore	St Catherines, UF	Car. Commander Retd	Warden
Cousins, Edward	Coldrey Lane	Has motor cycle	Warden
Tabb, Frank	Rose Cottage, LF		
Alton Hairdresser.	Has Austin car. Trained as warden in London		Warden
Cox, Albert	Whiteway Cottage		Warden
Hargrave, George	Froyle Mill	Can drive. Day or night	Warden
Blanchard, William	The Square, UF	Can drive	Warden
Blunden, Charles	Ovington Bungalow	Can drive. Builder	Rescue Party
Robinson, Peggy	Prince of Wales Inn	Day or night. Steel hat given	Fire Guard
Milne, Francis	Chappell Cottages	School age	First Aid Messenger
Lythgoe, H	Park Edge, UF	Worked in garden	First Aid
Lawrence, W.G.	Lower Froyle		First Aid
Ezzard, J	Upper Froyle		Fireman
Beckhurst, Richard	Lower Froyle	Bricklayer. Has cycle	Rescue Party
Squibb, Maurice	Upper Froyle	Motor cycle	First Aid
Batchelor, J.W	Rye Bridge	Motor cycle	Messenger
Bannon, Mrs	Brocas Farm	Can drive. Has car	Ambulance driver
Lady Smiley	Froyle House	Can drive. Has car	Ambulance driver
Vivian, Ernest	Lower Froyle	Master butcher.	Can drive
		Has van	Ambulance driver

Glasspool, Ernest	Millcourt Cottages	Gardener	
Milne, Mrs Mercy	Chappell Cottages	At Vicarage. Has cycle	First Aid Helper
Vincent, William	2 Park Lane	Any time	Phone duty
Rose, Walder	Manor House	Any time. Anti-gas course	First Aid. Phone duty
Andrew, Wilfred	Blundens Cottage	Farmer. Has car	
Hill, Mrs Hilda	Elm Croft	Trained	First Aid
Mabb, Minnie	Gothic Cottage	Any time. No car	First Aid Helper
Nash, Miss E	Lower Froyle		First Aid Helper
Knight, Mrs L	Lower Froyle		First Aid Helper
Pelton, Miss M	Oak Cottage	Day or night. No car	First Aid Helper
Cherrill	Lower Froyle	No car	First Aid Helper
Shilling, Mrs A	Lower Froyle	No car	First Aid Helper
More, Mrs R	Hodges Farm	Has a car	First Aid Helper
Sumner, Nina	Park Edge	Day only. Has car	First Aid
Walker, Vera	Oak Cottage	Any time. Will cook	Ambulance
Burns, Mary	Sylvesters Farm	Day or night. No car	First Aid
Cherrill, Miss G	Ewelme, LF	Day. No car	First Aid
Goschen, Ethleen	Sylvesters Farm	Day or night. Can drive anything.	
	No car, but can offer a horse		Ambulance driver
Laney, Frank	Coldrey	Day or night. No car	First Aid

According to Ann, her father was delighted to be offered a horse by Mrs Goschen, as he said it would save time cutting across country.

Bob White (pushing) and Francis Milne doing their bit for the war effort by collecting waste paper. Francis was also a First Aid Messenger



Nora Jupe tells us how Froyle School coped during the war:

“Just as education seemed to begin to make strides again, the storm clouds of the Second World War began to gather.

The Summer holiday of 1939 was divided into two parts; the first (for corn harvest) was from August 4th - 14th and on the children's return to school they were told to take their gas masks with them for adjustment and practice. These masks had been supplied by local wardens a few weeks earlier as another war now seemed inevitable. Two parents refused to let their children take their masks and four masks were faulty or the wrong size so this was reported to their own Air Raid Wardens, who had been training in wartime procedures for some months. The gas masks were supplied in strong cardboard boxes with a string shoulder strap (some children used ready-made bags and cases instead, mostly made from rexine, a 'leather-look' cloth). During the course of the war, the masks had to be taken everywhere with their owner and children were sent home to collect theirs if forgotten. Thankfully they never needed to be put into actual use but after the use of poisonous gas by the Germans in the First War, there was a great fear, especially in the first year of the war, that gas might be a lethal weapon again. Gas masks were manufactured from light sheets of rubber, strong but flexible; they had a pig-like filter or snout and a clear oval eye-screen; they were fitted to the head shape by adjustable straps. Gas mask practice became as regular an event as fire practice, although there is only one recorded practice at the school in July 1943.

By the time school reassembled on October 2nd things had settled down again..... School proceeded fairly normally apart from having buckets of sand and stirrup pumps on view and possibly sticky brown paper strips on some windows to prevent the glass shattering from blast. Arrangements must have been made for taking shelter in an air raid and traces of wooden battens on the Junior classroom window, plus old blackout curtains discovered years later in the 'cubbyhole', suggest that at least one room could be blacked out and used after dark, provided of course not a chink of light showed through! The first mention of enemy action in the Log Book was on October 1st, when the 'closing of registers was delayed as many children were late owing to Air Raid during the night'.

Attendances were low in the snowy winter in January 1945 when only 18 children out of a possible 59 attended school, the Log Book recorded, 'Many of the children have no suitable boots, the parents have the money but no coupons. Also suitable boots are in short supply in the shops'. Wellington boots were not made during the war as the rubber materials were scarce and required for military purposes.

Victory came at last and the entries in the Log for May 8th and 9th, 1945 were made in red ink (Red Letter Days!). There was no school on the two V.E.Days. All over the country, parties were arranged, in schools or in streets with fancy dress and flags flying. Two days school holiday were also given for V.J.Day on 15th and 16th August.”

I asked several Froyle residents, who were children at the time, what they remembered about the Second World War:-

Pat Pritchard, née Milne, who was five years old when war broke out, remembers, “Any spaces alongside the road were used to place old farm carts, huge concrete blocks and rolls of barbed wire in case of invasion. The women in the village worked in the fields, as the men had gone to war, and some of the older boys left school at lunchtime to harvest potatoes. The women also worked very hard arranging functions, such as whist drives and entertainments to raise money for a ‘Welcome Home Fund’ and the atmosphere in the village was wonderful. At Christmas Lady Talbot at Froyle Place gave us an exciting party for the whole school with Father Christmas coming down the main staircase and giving each and every one of us a present.”



Maureen Fry, née Chappell, who was at Froyle School from 1940 until 1946, said “We had to walk in single file on different sides of the road on our way to school in case of air raids. In Lower Froyle we were told to always walk on the left - I still do!”



Jack Cooper, at school from 1934 until 1941, said “Mr Knight felt that the older children should learn our Allies’ National Anthems. I remember learning the English words to the French National Anthem and singing them in class. The school windows were all taped up and classes finished earlier in the winter to get us all home before the air raids started.”

Ann Hill, who was born after the war started, still has vivid memories of those years. “I remember lying in



bed listening to our planes in the dark”, she said. “Of course, we had to be very careful with the blackout up at the windows at night. I remember the signs were taken down on the roads. My father made an air raid shelter in the garden and we all went into it when we thought the bombs might come. We had oil lamps down there, as well as a wood burning stove to help keep us warm. There were bunk beds, I remember, but no running water. You had to take food and water with you if you had time, as you had no idea how long you might have to stay down there.”

As we saw earlier, Ann’s father was the Air Raid Warden for Froyle. Her mother was also busy during the war, nursing and working with the Red Cross in the area. She received a medal for her service at the end of the War.

Pam Vivian’s family also had an air raid shelter in the garden of the Butcher’s Shop. “Ours often had a foot of water in it”, she said, “and we only slept there a few times in the early days when the planes came over Aldershot and Odiham.”

David Bennett was one of those children who came to Froyle from London.

“It was during the war-years that I first visited Froyle and spent a few months here. During this time I had to attend Froyle School. It seemed so safe in the country. It was good to sleep without fear of German bombers and Doodle-bugs and no interruption at school - well, I didn’t really mind that! The highlight of going to and from Froyle School was to watch the village blacksmith at work.

In Church Street, Alton, the Evangelical Free Church was then called the Foresters Hall. All types of events were staged there. One such event was a party for London kids only. I had a great time - the bonus of extra food a treat on its own.”



Francis Milne remembers standing in the hop fields and watching the Battle of Britain! “The Home Guard was formed and I was a messenger between Home Guard, A.R.P. and firefighters. Grandad and I caught rabbits; grandad prepared them for the pot and we sold them at 2/6d each, which was a main source of food during the war years.”



Victory Celebrations

A committee of twelve residents was set up to organise a number of celebrations in the village. Miss Mary Chubb, Mr Tom Milne and Mr James Andrew representing the Parish Council on the committee. We are not told in the Parish Council Minute Books what those celebrations consisted of, but our ‘War Kids’ remember them well.

Pat Pritchard tells us about V.E.Day, “We had a huge bonfire in the Recreation Ground. The road had just been resurfaced and the tar barrels made a base for the biggest bonfire I have ever seen. Union Jacks hung from every available spot, even on the trees in the Rec. and all the village turned out to sing the war songs, just to celebrate.”

The Pinnells family, sitting on top of their air raid shelter



Joyce Kemp told me a lovely anecdote, which, I believe, sums up a lot of people's attitude during war time. She remembers, "how everyone worked hard to help keep Britain fed. They often worked on even when the sirens had sounded. They were used to carrying on in bad weather so they were not going to stop for a few bombs!

One day, during the war, Auntie Ena called in to see us in Alton after her usual trip to market. We were chatting with friends about the bombs which had dropped nearby in the night.

'Well, I can't stand here talking', Auntie said, 'I've got a load of logs to move', and off she went. A friend of ours remarked, 'Hitler doesn't stand a chance - not while there are people about like your Aunt!'.'



Ena Westbrook in 1930 with her niece, Ruth Smither